

Hitched 1171

Chapter 1172

"Good riddance!" Priscilla muttered under her breath, glaring at the empty doorway where her daughter-in-law had just exited. "Can't cook, can't clean, no grandkids... what's the point of having her around?" She shook her head in exasperation. "No mother-in-law in the world would be happy with that!"

Priscilla reluctantly stepped out of the car, watching as Zane drove off towards the Beacon Hill Mansion. He hadn't even reached the entrance when he was stopped in his tracks.

Zane tried explaining for what felt like an eternity, "I'm Elysia's college buddy, she invited me over," but the guard wasn't having any of it.

Frustrated, he dialed Elysia's number, only to have Tarquin answer, "Who are you?"

"I'm Elysia's friend from college, Zane," Zane replied, his annoyance mounting.

"Who?" Tarquin repeated, feigning ignorance.

"Elysia's college buddy, Zane!" he reiterated, his patience wearing thin.

Tarquin cut the call abruptly, leaving Zane fuming, fists clenched on the steering wheel. He was sure Tarquin was doing it on purpose. "Just you wait, Tarquin," he muttered to himself, "one day I'll tell you straight to your face-I'm Elysia's husband!"

Why Tarquin held such a grudge against him was beyond Zane. After all, his feelings for Elysia were a well-kept secret, even from Elysia herself. Perhaps it was just Zane's good looks that made Tarquin feel threatened.

After calming himself, Zane tried calling again. Tarquin answered once more, with the same dismissive, "Who are you?"

This time, Zane carefully contained his irritation. "Zane, Winona's husband."

Tarquin hung up again, but moments later, the security waved Zane through, signaling he could proceed.

Barely managing to keep his frustration in check, Zane started the car and headed toward the mansion. A quick glance at his GPS made him frown; he was still ten minutes away, despite thinking he was much closer.

He knew someone of Tarquin's stature would have an extensive security perimeter, but this was ridiculous. Zane was well aware that from the moment he entered the perimeter, every move he made was being watched. The path ahead was likely dotted with sharpshooters, a veritable fortress. No one in their right mind would try to force their way in.

The disparity in power between him and Tarquin was glaringly obvious, and Zane's mood soured even further.

Finally, Zane arrived at the Beacon Hill Mansion. Inside the living room, Elysia, Tarquin, Elliot, Evan, Elijah, Blossom, and Caroline were all waiting for him. Due to Pamela's delicate condition and Baby and Emmett's timid nature, they had been sent out to avoid any potential altercations.

As Zane walked into the room, a sense of foreboding washed over him. His instincts were proven right when, out of nowhere, a phone was hurled in his direction. He barely dodged it before Blossom came charging at him, tears streaming down her face.

"Zane, you jerk!" she yelled, fists flying. "You promised us you'd take care of Winona! It's been over a year and you only just found out she was in trouble!"

"How could you say you loved her?" Blossom sobbed, landing a punch. "You let her down, and you let us down!"

Taking a cue from Elysia's words the day before, Blossom continued to pummel Zane. He couldn't fight back in front of Elysia, so he tried to defend himself, but before he could react, Elliot and Evan had grabbed his arms.

"Mr. Zane, don't move," one of them said, holding tight. "Let Blossom blow off some steam. She'll feel better after she gives you a good whacking."

Zane could only stand there, speechless.

Chapter 1173

Until Blossom wore herself out, Elysia stepped in to break things up.

"Alright, Blossom, it's not entirely his fault."

Elysia pulled Blossom away, and the two kids let go of Zane.

Zane was left with a bloody nose and scratches all over his face. Blossom might have been just an ordinary woman, but she was still an adult and packed a punch. Plus, Evan had taught her a couple of moves before Zane showed up.

Zane gingerly touched his face, wincing at the pain. He was furious, but he had to keep it under wraps. There was no way he could retaliate against Blossom in front of Elysia.

Elysia helped Blossom sit down and gently wiped away her tears and the blood on her hands. Then she turned to Zane with feigned concern.

"Are you okay? Do you need a doctor to take a look?"

Hearing Elysia's concern lifted Zane's spirits a bit. Just as he was about to

respond, Tarquin chimed in with a mocking tone.

"If a few scratches from a girl get you down, that's hardly manly."

Zane gritted his teeth but told Elysia, "I'm fine, don't worry."

"Take a seat," Elysia invited him.

She got up to fetch a first aid kit, "Let me clean up those cuts on your face."

Zane was taken aback, but the dark cloud over his heart lifted instantly. He smiled warmly, "Sure."

Tarquin pursed his lips, his expression dark. If it weren't for Elysia's plan, he'd never let her treat Zane personally.

Elysia opened the first aid kit, suppressing the urge to stab Zane with a knife, and picked up some alcohol and cotton swabs to clean his wounds. As soon as the swab touched Zane's cut, he hissed in pain and flinched away. Elysia had spiked the alcohol-it stung a lot!

"Can you handle it?" she asked.

Zane, unwilling to show weakness, nodded, "I can!"

But soon, cold sweat broke out all over him from the pain.

"Elysia, Elysia, Elysia..." she said softly, looking into Zane's eyes.

Everyone in the room knew Elysia was attempting to hypnotize Zane, and they watched tensely, barely breathing for fear of disrupting her and causing the attempt to fail.

Tarquin's brow furrowed, his concern for Elysia evident. She had confided in him last night that she planned to hypnotize Zane to delve into his subconscious and find where Winona was being held. He had hesitated because Zane's feelings for Elysia were something he had kept from her, afraid she'd be disgusted if she found out.

Time seemed to drag on until Elysia suddenly gasped in horror, her body going rigid with shock.

The room held its collective breath, anxious yet unwilling to interrupt. "Ugh-"

Elysia bolted to the bathroom, retching.

Everyone hurried after her. Elysia was hunched over the sink, throwing up her breakfast. Tarquin stood by, gently rubbing her back, trying to comfort her. Elliot quickly filled a cup with water, ready for her to rinse her mouth.

Elysia's distress was palpable, and the group crowded the bathroom door, their faces etched with worry.

Once she was done, they anxiously asked, "What happened?"

Elysia's eyebrows knitted together, struggling to find the words. She hadn't expected this, hadn't expected that Zane actually liked her. His subconscious was filled with thoughts of her-he'd even imagined their wedding!

She was thoroughly repulsed. No wonder Zane treated Winona the way he did; he didn't really care for her at all!

Chapter 1174

Zane had a thing for her, but when it came to money, he opted for Winona.

He was using Winona as a stepping stone, planning to come back to her once he was well-off.

This kind of behavior was the epitome of a scoundrel, a downright disgrace to love!

It was absolutely infuriating!

Elysia swallowed her disgust and reassured everyone, "I'm alright, but he's hidden Winona well. Even hypnosis didn't reveal her exact location, though we have some leads."

"We need to deal with him first, so he doesn't catch on and harm Winona."

Once he was gone, they could dive into details.

Everyone nodded in agreement, "Yeah, yeah."

When Zane snapped back to reality, Elysia was still tending to his wounds, which were stinging something fierce.

Zane felt something was off, a gnawing unease.

It was like he had just blacked out!

Elysia asked nonchalantly, "What's up? Still hurts?"

Zane frowned, glancing at the wall clock. Only a few minutes had passed.

It was impossible for anyone to have pulled a fast one on him in that short time.

It must just be the pain!

"Nah, it's just a bit sore, but I can handle it."

Elysia remarked, "Blossom's nails are long, she might've pressed too hard."

Blossom played along, "Sorry, Zane. Seeing you just reminded me of Winona, and I got flustered."

Zane was seething inside, but maintained a composed demeanor, "I'm to blame, not you guys."

Once Elysia finished patching him up, the group resumed discussing Winona and the illegitimate child.

Time slipped by, and when Zane next glanced at the clock, it was already after eleven in the morning.

He hadn't noticed Evan had discreetly set the clock back to the right time.

The hypnosis had lasted much longer than just a few minutes.

As soon as Zane left, Tarquin whisked Elysia upstairs.

In the bedroom, he pulled her into his arms, his voice low as he asked, "Did you find out?"

Elysia felt the nausea return, "Did you know all along?"

"Yeah, I didn't tell you because I knew it'd make you sick."

"It's pretty nauseating! How'd you know?"

"Keaton found out. Zane's been harboring a crush, kept it under wraps. No one else could dig it up."

Keaton's reputation as the 'Love Guru' wasn't for nothing; he had a knack for unearthing matters of the heart.

Being the object of Zane's affection left Elysia feeling pretty grossed out!

She had a lot she wanted to rant about but felt too weary to do so.

"Let's not dwell on that mess, tell me about Winona."

"Zane's a sly one, he's hidden Winona well. I couldn't pinpoint her location, but I discovered some odd spots. Let me sketch them out for you."

"Alright."

Elysia grabbed a notepad and started sketching for Tarquin.

Just then, Tarquin's phone buzzed. It was Lowell calling.

"Tarquin, we've found evidence in the Thorne family basement confirming Winona was indeed there."

Tarquin's sharp eyes narrowed. Over the past few days, he pondered a question.

If Blake was really an accomplice, why hadn't Zane silenced him by now?

He had the clout to spring the Thorne family from jail, so surely he could also ensure their demise behind bars.

Not killing them wasn't out of mercy.

It could only mean the Thorne family had something on Zane, something he feared.

"Got it, set it up. I need to see Blake!"

Chapter 1175

In the dimly lit room of the county jail, Blake's heart skipped a beat the moment he laid eyes on Tarquin.

"Mr. Bradford," he stammered, his voice barely above a whisper.

Tarquin stood there, his expression as unreadable as a poker player's.

Blake fidgeted nervously before taking a seat opposite Tarquin.

Breaking the silence with a calm demeanor, Tarquin inquired, "You know about Elysia's background, right?"

Blake nodded furiously, eager to please.

"Yes, yes, she's... she's the daughter of the richest family in Oceanopolis!"

Just thinking about Elysia's pedigree made Blake feel like someone was twisting a knife in his gut. If only he'd known she was such high society, he would have treated her like royalty, for sure. Imagine the Hawkins family showing up for a family reunion—he'd be rolling in dough!

Instead, fate handed the Thorne family a priceless gem, and what did they do? Treated her like a stray cat, tormenting her on the daily. Now he had zilch to show for it and was constantly on edge, dreading the day Clayton might storm into the prison to settle the score.

Tarquin, eyes gleaming with a hint of mockery, saw right through Blake's anxiety.

"Don't worry about the Hawkins family coming after you. You'll never get the chance to meet them."

Blake blinked, bewildered. "Huh?"

Tarquin cut to the chase, "I've got questions for you. Answer honestly, and I'll get your family out of here, send you all abroad."

"But if you don't cooperate, well, let's just say, your time's up."

Blake's eyes widened in panic. "What... what do you want to know?"

"Where's Winona?"

At the mention of Winona's name, Blake's face turned an ashen shade.

"What do you know?" he blurted out.

"I'm asking the questions here."

Blake's breath came in quick, shallow gasps, and his eyes darted around the room. "... I don't know anything."

Without another word, Tarquin turned to leave.

Blake, desperation creeping into his voice, called after him, "You're not gonna ask anymore?"

Tarquin's voice was cold as the winter wind. "If you don't want to talk, I won't force you. Just be ready to say your goodbyes today."

Blake was on the verge of tears. How was this not being forced?

Knowing Tarquin could back up his threat, Blake quickly relented. "Wait! I'll talk, I'll talk. I was involved in the whole Winona thing, but I swear I don't know where she is now!"

"About a year ago, someone reached out to me, offered me half a million bucks to use Elysia's whereabouts to kidnap Winona."

"After we nabbed her, we stashed her in my basement."

"But then some people showed up and took her away."

"As for where they took her, I honestly have no clue!"

Tarquin's brow furrowed. "Use Elysia's whereabouts?"

"Yeah, the guy said Winona was really protective of Elysia. Mention her, and Winona would take the bait."

Tarquin's expression darkened. "Was this person Zane?"

Blake's lips twitched, and he nodded, "Yeah. At first, I didn't know it was him, but then this woman showed up at my place to see Winona and dropped Zane's name."

"She told Winona all of this was Zane's doing and even tortured Winona in the basement for hours."

"I recorded the whole thing on the sly."

Tarquin asked, "Zane hasn't killed you to cover it up because of this video?"

"Yeah, I told Zane that if anything happened to us, the video would go public." "Where's the video?"

"I... I buried a copy under the oak tree in my yard, and a friend of mine has another copy."

Tarquin pulled out his phone, showing Blake a picture of Sarah. "Is this the woman?"

"Yes, yes, that's her! She's got something going on with Zane."

Tarquin sent a quick text to Lowell, instructing him to dig up the Thorne family yard for the video.

Returning his focus to Blake, Tarquin asked, "Who took Winona from your place?"

"I didn't recognize them. They seemed like traffickers. The lead guy had an eye patch. I heard someone call him 'One-Eyed Jack.'"

Chapter 1176

"I don't know much else, Mr. Bradford. You're the big shot here, and you have to keep your word, please! Just get the three of us out of the country as fast as you can!"

Staying here was no longer an option.

With a Tarquin, a Clayton, and a Zane lurking around, danger was everywhere!

Blake was itching to fly overseas right away.

Tarquin gave him a knowing look. "I always keep my promises. After the dust settles, I'll arrange for you all to leave."

Letting them rot in a jail cell was too easy!

Just like Gideon Bradford, they'd be better suited for life abroad!

Tarquin planned to hand them over to Clayton first; then Clayton would find them a nice "retirement plan."

The Thorne family had tormented Elysia for twenty years; it was time they spent the rest of their lives paying for it!

Blake, clueless about Tarquin's real intentions, thought going abroad meant living the high life and was over the moon about it.

After meeting Blake, Tarquin had a private word with Juliet and her daughter.

Juliet and her daughter weren't privy to much.

All they knew was that Blake had once kidnapped Winona and even built a basement to keep her hidden.

After meeting with the family, Tarquin reached out to his contacts in the police department.

He was trying to track down the one-eyed man.

Tarquin had a plan to have Zane bring Winona back, but judging by Zane's current attitude, that route seemed rocky.

He decided to keep his options open, hoping to trace the breadcrumbs back to Winona sooner rather than later.

His friend in the police department warned him, "Why are you tangled up with this guy? The one-eyed man is a wanted criminal, with strong ties to Burmalia."

"He smuggles people over there, making anywhere from ten to thirty grand per person."

"And that's just the going rate. If you're worth more, he earns even more!"

"The police have been after him for ages, but he's still at large."

Tarquin requested a photo of the one-eyed man and showed it to Blake.

Blake nodded vigorously. "That's him!"

After leaving the prison, Tarquin was deep in thought.

Winona had stayed with the Thorne family for just over a month before the one-eyed man took her. Her current whereabouts, whether still in the country or in Burmalia, remained uncertain.

If she was in Burmalia, things were grim.

Burmalia was notorious as a living hell; once you were in, getting out was nearly impossible!

Suddenly, Tarquin's phone buzzed. It was Elliot calling.

The little guy sounded anxious, "Dad, where are you?"

"What's up?"

"Zane called Mom. He says he has news about Winona and wants to meet her alone!"

Tarquin's expression darkened. "I'll be right home."

As soon as Tarquin walked through the door, Elysia rushed to him.

"I have to meet with Zane!"

Tarquin was skeptical. "What exactly did he say?"

"He just mentioned he had information about Winona and preferred to discuss it in person."

"Did he specify what kind of information?"

"Nope!"

"Did you tell him to come here?"

"I did, but he insisted it was a matter of Winona's safety and had to

anyone else but me." Coter

He wouldn't t

Tarquin frowned. Was Zane using Winona as bait to meet Elysia?

What was he scheming?!

Elysia was on edge, "Tarquin, I need to hear him out! I have to find out what he knows!"

Tarquin pondered for a moment, "Take Evan with you."

Evan could double as a bodyguard without arousing Zane's suspicion.

Elliot quickly chimed in, "I'm coming too. Evan and I will go with Mom."

Elysia hesitated for a second, "Alright, I'll call Zane back."

Zane didn't see the five-year-old Elliot and Évan as a threat and agreed to meet Elysia at a café.

Chapter 1177

At four in the afternoon, Elysia walked into the coffee shop with Elliot and Evan in

tow.

Zane had been waiting for a while.

He was dressed in slacks and a white shirt, looking a bit worn out yet still managing to exude a sunny, boy-next-door charm.

Zane had that bookish, honest-guy look.

His features were sharp and dignified, the kind that made you think, "Wow, he's got it all together!"

Anyone who didn't know him would never guess that beneath his handsome and genteel exterior lay a heart as black as coal.

Elysia clenched her fist discreetly, marching straight toward him.

Elliot and Evan followed closely, purposefully beaming at Zane as he greeted him with exaggerated enthusiasm, "Hello, Mr. Zane!"

Seeing the face that looked so much like Tarquin's sent a shiver down Zane's spine.

He had no intention of playing father to Tarquin's kids.

Once he and Elysia were together, they'd have children of their own.

As for Tarquin's kids, he'd make sure they were out of the picture.

In Zane's eyes, he was the only one worthy of Elysia bearing children for.

No other man deserved it.

Feigning warmth, Zane raised his hand to tousle Elliot and Evan's hair, "Hey there."

Elysia sat down across from Zane, and told Elliot and Evan, "I need to talk to Mr. Zane, why don't you go play in the kids' area? I'll call you when we're done." "Okay!" Elliot and Evan chirruped, dashing off toward the play area in the corner. Quite the little actor.

Elysia explained, "These two just wouldn't stay home, so I had to bring them along."

"I totally get it. Kids that age are all about their moms."

Elysia cut to the chase, "Any news about Winona?"

Zane frowned slightly, releasing a gentle sigh.

"Winona's been kidnapped. The kidnappers reached out today demanding money. They threatened to sell her off to Burmalia if I don't pay Worse, they said if they couldn't sett her, they'd kill her."

Elysia's eyes widened, "Did you... did you call the cops?"

"No, they warned me they're watching every move I make. If I go to the police,
they'll kill her immediately."

"Isn't contacting me risky?"

"No. What they fear is the police. As long as we don't involve them, they won't do anything drastic.
Money is their endgame."

Zane

at Elysia with a falsely

you

comforting look, "I'm telling know Winona's alive.

SO

have some peace of mind."

you

Elysia frowned deeply, "How can you be sure they really have Winona?"

Zane pulled out his phone, locating a video and handing it to Elysia, "They

s after calling.!!!to

Winona in the video. Take a look."

Elysia took Zane's phone hurriedly.

With just one glance, she covered her mouth, tears springing to her eyes.

In the video, a young, pretty woman was shackled, wearing filthy clothes, curled up in a corner.

When someone called her name, she looked at the camera, terrified!

But she quickly covered her head with her hands, trembling.

Her arms were covered in scars, evidence of abuse.

Even though Winona's face only appeared for a few seconds, Elysia recognized her instantly!

It was Winona!

What had happened to their Winona?!

Elysia felt a deep ache in her heart.

Zane handed her a tissue, "Don't be upset. At least she's alive. We still have a chance to see her again."

Elysia ignored the tissue, instead standing abruptly and heading for the restroom. She feared she might lose control, might tear Zane's deceitful mask right off his face!

Zane got up to follow her, and Elliot and Evan quickly trailed behind.

Meanwhile, Tarquin was glued to Elijah's computer screen, watching all of this unfold, his brow furrowed in intense concentration.

Chapter 1178

Elysia was in a tough spot again.

After what felt like an eternity, she emerged from the bathroom, her eyes puffy and red.

"Mommy!"

"I'm okay, really. Don't worry about me. You guys go and play," she reassured Elliot and Evan, sending them off before returning to her booth to continue the conversation with Zane.

"It's definitely Winona in the video this time, no doubt about it," Elysia confirmed, her voice shaky.

"Yeah, I saw it too. But don't lose hope just yet. Things could be worse-she's still alive, even if she's suffering," Zane replied, trying to offer some comfort.

Elysia took a deep, shaky breath, "If we don't call the cops, how do we get Winona out?"

"Here's what I'm thinking: for her safety, we hold off on calling the authorities. We do what the kidnappers say for now. Once we have Winona safe, then we go to the police."

Elysia nodded in agreement, "Right. Winona's safety comes first. So, what are their demands?"

"They want money, and they want the Newsom family heirloom."

"How much money are we talking about?" Elysia asked.

"A billion!" Zane declared.

Her eyes widened, "How much?!"

"A billion dollars. U.S. dollars."

Elysia was stunned into silence.

Tarquin and the kids heard the figure loud and clear, and they all frowned in unison. Even with their wealth, a billion dollars was an astronomical sum. Zane was clearly trying to exploit the situation, using Winona as leverage to extort money from Tarquin.

Ridley probably couldn't come up with that kind of cash, but Tarquin could. Zane was aiming to squeeze Tarquin for the billion dollars and snag Ridley's heirloom jewels while he was at it. His plan was as cunning as it was bold.

Zane continued, "Dad's fond of

Winona, so to save her, he'd

probably be willing to part withel

family's treasure. But com with he with a billion in cash? That g

"Even if I liquidated everything Winona

and I own, plus the Newsom family's assets, it wouldn't be enough. The only one who might manage is Mr. Bradford."

"But who knows if he's willing to help Winona out of this mess."

Elysia wasn't naive. She knew Zane was trying to rope Tarquin into his scheme. Inside, she fumed, but outwardly she remained composed.

"I'll talk to him about it. If paying the ransom gets Winona back, that's great. But

I'm worried something might go wrong in the process," she said.

"It won't," Zane assured her. "These kidnappers want money, not trouble. If we pay up and they still harm her, they know we'll hunt them down. It's not in their interest."

Elysia nodded, "Makes sense. I don't know if Tarquin can pull together that much cash on short notice. I'll have to ask."

"One more thing," Zane added, "I'm worried Mr. Bradford might call the cops if he finds out. It's best if we keep him in the dark for now."

Elysia hesitated, "And how am I supposed to get the money without telling him?"

"If he truly loves you, he'd give you anything-no questions asked, not even a billion dollars," Zane said, trying to sound convincing.

Elysia was taken aback. So, if she asked Tarquin for a billion dollars and he dared

to ask why, it meant he didn't love her? What a manipulative jerk!

She cursed Zane inwardly, but outwardly she nodded, "I understand. I won't tell him the whole story yet."

"Good. Let's stay in touch."

With that, Elysia parted ways with Zane and took Elliot and Evan back to Number One Mansion.

As soon as they got in the car, Evan piped up, "We heard everything. He just wants Dad's money!"

Elysia frowned, "I know."

Elliot sat quietly, his little face serious and thoughtful. It seemed like the situation

might be more complicated than just money.

Chapter 1179

Back at Number One Mansion, Elysia immediately threw herself into Tarquin's arms, tears streaming down her face.

"I saw Winona, Tarquin! I'm a hundred percent sure it was her in the video!"

"I know, I saw it too. It's a good thing, it means she's alive."

"But she had bruises, and the terror in her eyes... She's definitely been through hell."

Tarquin held her tight, whispering words of comfort.

"We're getting closer to her, Elysia. I promise you, the day we rescue her isn't far off."

Elysia wiped her tears away, "Zane's trying to use Winona to extort money from you!"

"I've got money, and I'm ready to give it to him if needed. Don't worry about that." Elysia immediately protested, "That's our family's money! Why should he get any of it? I'm trying to think of a way to get Winona back without handing him a dime." Tarquin spoke softly, "Leave the rescue to me. I'll figure something out."

Elysia sighed, feeling a bit out of her depth. Her mind ran a mile a minute, but she couldn't think of a foolproof plan.

The only thing she could come up with was trying to hypnotize Zane, but it didn't yield the results she hoped for. They still didn't know Winona's exact location.

"I'm heading to the study to finish sketching those suspicious locations from Zane's subconscious."

She had only managed to draw part of them before Zane called and asked to meet up.

"Alright, you go on ahead."

Elysia left for the study, while Tarquin headed over to Elliot's room.

Evan and Elijah were there too, all three kids glued to the surveillance feed, watching Zane's every move.

After parting ways with Elysia, Zane went to see Ridley, supposedly about some family heirloom.

Tarquin approached them, "What do you make of this situation?"

Elliot chimed in, "I feel like there's more to it. Besides wanting money, I think Zane has another agenda."

Elijah nodded in agreement, "I have the same feeling. Zane is cunning. If he's meeting with Mom, it's not just about the money."

Tarquin furrowed his brow, deep in thought.

A while later, Elysia called for Tarquin to join her in the study.

She had sketched out several significant locations from Zane's subconscious. There were eight in total.

Elysia pointed out, "These places must

have some importance to her

if they surfaced in his

mind."

"This one is the library at Jindale University."

That's where she first met Zane.

Elysia frowned, continuing, "This looks like an old farmhouse, probably where Zane grew up."

"The rest, I can't pinpoint. There's

little

more

than just a window, with nothing outside. Look, this one has

a view of the

"And this one, it's a windowless, pitch-black house, like a cage."

"Then there's this, which looks like an office, with a long corridor outside."

"Eight places, six are gloomy, only two are bright- the library and this one."

"This last place is surrounded by the sea

behind. It seems like a place Zane

Tarquin, Elliot, and Elijah studied each sketch with serious expressions.

Just as they were deep in thought, Elysia's phone rang.

It was an unfamiliar number.

Elliot was cautious and signaled to Elijah, who quickly retreated to his room to tap into the call.

Elysia answered, "Hello?"

"Miss Elysia, we have Winona. If you call the cops, she's dead!"

"And we don't want your husband meddling either. If he tries anything, she's dead!"

"Get a billion dollars ready and meet up with Zane. He'll bring you to Winona!"

Chapter 1180

"Remember, only you can take the money out! If there's anyone else with you, we won't hesitate to harm your friend!"

"Ms. Thorne, for your friend's safety, you'd better be smart. We're watching you!"

The line went dead as the kidnappers hung up.

Elysia was still in shock when her phone rang again. It was Zane.

"Elysia, did the kidnappers contact you?" he asked urgently.

"They just hung up. What's going on?" she replied, trying to steady her voice.

Zane explained, "They found out about our meeting this afternoon. They're worried you'll call the cops or tell Mr. Bradford, so they're warning you."

"They know Mr. Bradford is not someone to mess with and they're afraid of his involvement."

Elysia took a deep breath, trying to keep her composure. "They want me to meet up with you."

"Yeah, I'm on my way to the Newsom family to collect the family heirloom. Once I have it, I'll come pick you up."

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"I have no idea. They didn't say. They just mentioned they're watching our every move, and if we don't comply, they'll harm your friend."

Elysia was at a loss for words, while Tarquin, Elliot, and Elijah looked grim.

They suspected Zane was up to more than just a simple ransom.

Zane intended to take Elysia with him!

He was manipulating the situation, using the kidnappers as a cover.

He wanted to leave Jindale City with Elysia, a billion dollars, and the precious gemstone!

From Zane's perspective, Elysia was unaware that Winona was in his clutches or how he truly felt about her.

So, Elysia would trust him!

And given her close bond with Winona, she'd do anything for her!

She wouldn't risk Winona's life by involving the police or letting Tarquin

investigate.

Tarquin's expression was dark and stormy. Someone dared to target his wife? Oh, they were in for it!

Just then, Tarquin's phone buzzed with a call from Ridley.

"Hello, Ridley," Tarquin answered.

Ridley's voice was fraught with urgency. Mr. Bradford, what do we do? The kidnappers just called me, demanding I hand over the family heirloom to Zane!"

"Zane called too, saying the kidnappers instructed him to collect it. He'll be here in half an hour."

Tarquin frowned. "I'm aware. Don't worry. I'll arrange for the gem to be delivered to you. When Zane arrives, give it to him."

"Wait, give it to him?!" Ridley was taken aback.

He knew the gem was priceless!

Though it wasn't from his family, its value was undeniable!

Rumor had it online that the gem was worth more than the entire Newsom family estate!

"Don't stress," Tarquin assured him. "Consider the gem on my tab. Even if it's lost, you won't be held accountable."

"I..." Ridley was both touched and guilt-ridden.

He felt bad for letting Tarquin shoulder so much.

"Just wait for Zane at home and keep up the act. I have a plan for Winona, so don't worry."

"Alright, alright."

After ending the call, Tarquin immediately contacted Keaton, cutting straight to the chase.

"Send your gemstone to the Newsom family right away."

Keaton was taken aback. "What?!"

"If anything goes wrong, I'll take responsibility."

Keaton protested, "It's not just about

fuey! This is the only one in

and I cherish it. It's for my

wife."

"Stop arguing and do it! If Winona gets hurt because of that gem, and it makes

Elysia upset, I won't forgive you!"

"Look, I get you need to smooth things over with your wife, but don't throw your buddy under the bus!
I'm

a person too, you know! I" Us! I'm

went dead as Tarquin hung up.

Keaton was left speechless.